

*Corrected Copy*

ADDRESS BY J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA, TO ANNUAL WINTER MEETING  
OF STATE ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT SUPERVISORS, JEFFERSON HOTEL,  
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, FRIDAY, JANUARY  
21, 1949, At 10:45 A.M.

This, I believe, is the third time I have appeared before this group at your annual meeting, and it is an occasion on which I feel honored to have an invitation to speak. This group of some 140 supervisors, who are all serving without pay in an effort to protect the soil and water resources of our State, is making a distinct contribution to the general welfare of all our people, both from a state and a national standpoint.

No one may boast of doing more important work than those who are striving to find better ways of using our land and water resources, to provide food and other raw materials that coming generations of South Carolinians must depend upon.

We must face the unpleasant fact that the productive soil areas of the world are being rapidly depleted, while the earth's population is growing to almost unbelievable proportions. The enormous increase in world population may be seen in the fact that when this nation was founded in 1776, there were 600 million people on earth. Today, there are more than 2,000 million, and the figure may grow to nearly 3,000 million while some of us here are still living.

It is obvious that the soil of the earth is limited in what it can produce. We can make it support our vast population only by the most careful conservation of all its resources. And yet, today, the fertility of the earth is not being safeguarded on the proper scale either in our own country or in many others. There are a few exceptions. Some of the countries of Western Europe, such as France, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, have proved that forests and soils, when properly cared for, can be depended upon for century after century.



But here in America we have engaged in the most reckless exploitation of land resources the world has ever seen. Even within the last four decades we have reduced our timber reserves by more than 40 per cent. Out of our aggregate of a billion acres of grazing lands, farm pasture lands, and crop lands, more than one quarter has already been ruined or severely damaged. Much of the remainder has been impaired by soil erosion in varying degrees.

If our children and grandchildren are to have what they need to keep alive, we must do something about it in our own generation. The problem is not merely one of food. There is much more to it than that. When we analyze the business and industry of this nation, we find that well over half of our national economy is based upon the use and handling of the products of the land.

Here in South Carolina we are engaged upon a vast program of industrial development. In 1948, a total of \$230,000,000 worth of new industries either began operation, began construction, or were announced for future construction. More industries are coming into the State every month. They must have raw materials from the land in order to survive. We, therefore, have the two-fold problem of increasing our food supply for a growing population, and of increasing our production of raw materials for industry. We cannot meet this problem without an intelligent attempt to conserve our soil resources.

There is much reason to be encouraged by the progress we are already making, in which you supervisors have so important a role. Out of the 11,000,000 acres in South Carolina farms, I am told that nearly 4,500,000 acres are covered by district soil conservation plans. About half of the planned soil practices have actually been applied.

I think it would be well to review for a few moments the action taken thus far in approaching this great conservation job. In 1937, when I was a member of the State Senate, representing Edgefield County, we people who had been assiduously working to



seek Federal approval of the Clark's Hill power, navigation, and flood control project on the Savannah River, were informed that one of the prerequisites to such approval, was the passage by the Legislatures of South Carolina and Georgia of a soil conservation bill. Furthermore, I had begun to realize the vital importance of improved care of the soil, and become convinced that prudence and necessity demanded that we adopt methods of conservation. Interest in the subject developed and a group composed of your present State Committee brought before us a proposed bill known as the Soil Conservation Districts Law. I was proud to be the sponsor of this Act, which was passed during the 1937 session. South Carolina became one of the first states to pass this legislation, which set up legally-constituted districts that are political sub-divisions of the State. It was a sensible approach to the problem, and certainly a democratic way to seek a solution. Two supervisors are appointed by the State Committee, and three are elected by the qualified electors in the area concerned. This board of five supervisors, with the assistance of Federal, State and other agencies, makes a concerted approach to the problem of soil conservation.

Much progress has been made since the Act was passed, a fact which may be seen by anyone traveling our highways. Fields are being terraced. Many of the rolling steeper areas are being strip-cropped. Sod waterways for disposing of surplus water from the fields can be seen, especially in the Piedmont. Wet and soggy areas are being drained. Pastures are being planted, and blankets of green can be observed from the mountains to the sea, which not only furnishes year-round grazing for livestock, but protects the soil as well.

But the job has not yet been done, by any means. It is a task of such broad proportions that every public-minded person should develop an interest in it. The vast size of the problem may be seen by recalling the language of the Soil District Act of 1937.



I quote: "It is hereby declared to be a policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of the soil and soil resources of this State, and for the control and prevention of soil erosion, and thereby to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers and harbors, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this State."

Mindful of these words, I gave an important place to soil conservation in my Annual Address to the General Assembly last week. I pointed out that every acre of land in South Carolina will grow something, and that our State has a real opportunity to help feed others and create a more prosperous agriculture for ourselves, if we will put all our land to profitable use. For instance, it is estimated that there are 3,000,000 acres in 12 counties alone in the coastal plain area which could be brought into cultivation if properly drained. It must be remembered that we now have only 5,000,000 acres in cultivation.

It may be well to comment, at this time, on the four recommendations I made to the General Assembly:

1. That the Legislature make provision for the Clemson Extension Service to sponsor, in conjunction with other agricultural agencies, an intensive educational program which will bring home to our people the vital necessity of soil conservation, and teach them how to practice it. I would like to emphasize the importance of this recommendation. We will not reach our objectives in this field unless everyone understands something of the importance of conserving our soil and water resources. The farmer, the butcher, the barber, and the cotton mill president must all understand that when muddy water runs out of a field, that this not only costs the farmer something, but costs everyone who buys food, clothing, and shelter. It has been interesting to note the various groups in South Carolina taking an interest in soil conservation, such as merchants, teachers,



bankers, machinery dealers, and others. All have made direct contributions to this undertaking in South Carolina. The educational job they are doing should be intensified and speeded up.

2. That the Legislature make provision for the Clemson Experiment Station to conduct research concerning the various questions involved in soil conservation, with special emphasis on the maintenance of drainage ditches and the handling of land that has been drained. There are many fields in which research is needed in the broad subject we are discussing. If we are to do the best job in carrying out soil conservation measures, we must know the facts. Research provides the answer.

3. That the Legislature make provision for an organized study of our drainage laws, with a view to modernizing them. A visit by some of our legislators and agricultural experts to other states having similar problems would undoubtedly be helpful. The multitude of drainage laws now on the statute books are in most cases out of date. I understand that some other states are making real progress in attacking this problem, and if desirable the State Government will assist in sending a group of Legislators and agency representatives, along with soil supervisors, to other sections of the country to study drainage methods. This should be done sometime this spring or summer in order that some progress may be made before the 1950 Legislature.

4. That the county authorities of the several counties make available to our farmers, through their Soil Conservation districts, more of the necessary equipment to promote soil conservation practices, and assist them in every way possible to participate in this worthy program. In this recommendation, I was thinking about equipment that farmers themselves do not own. Examples of this would be draglines for construction of drainage ditches, bull-dozer for clearing land and building farm ponds, and other such heavy equipment. I have recently been informed that a number of counties have already made available this type of equipment on a reimbursement basis. Reasonable



charges are made to the farms, and the county is thus reimbursed. Some counties are making direct grants to the soil supervisors for the purchase of equipment. I understand that Horry County granted more than \$60,000 to its local soil conservation district. Florence is now considering a similar step. Spartanburg recently made arrangements for the purchase of terracing equipment. The same is true of Hampton, Orangeburg, Greenville, Laurens, and many others. This procedure has many advantages, since it requires no overhead expenses.

Thus you can see that your State Government and your county governments are beginning to recognize their responsibilities to our citizens in the promotion of soil conservation.

With this in mind, I want to ask you, as District Supervisors, to give as much attention as you possibly can to your State Government, not only as it relates to conservation, but in every field of its activities. It is gratifying to note an awakening interest in government on the part of many of our citizens.

As a State we have accomplished much during the last few years. But much of the task of improving our government and raising the income of our people still lies ahead. Your State Government cannot undertake that task without the keen interest and cooperation of its citizens. That is why I ask you today to keep informed as to the progress of our government, and to exert your influence whenever and wherever possible to improve it.

I want to say again that I appreciate the fine work this group is doing for their State. Many of you here today have been serving as supervisors since the organization of the first soil district. I am thinking particularly of men like Joe Douthit, your President; Pete Player over at Bishopville; L. D. Holmes in my own home county of Edgefield, and many others that I could mention. I would also like to commend Ernest Carnes, State Conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service, who has worked so diligently in the interest



of conserving our soil. The County, the State, the Federal Government, the farmer, and every individual citizen, have a stake in this matter. As your Governor, I will continue to support the fine work you are doing in every way I can.